
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 5357 (as amended by House "A")*

AN ACT CONCERNING CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM.

SUMMARY:

This bill requires a local or regional board of education to form a district-wide school attendance review team ("review team") if the school district has a:

1. 10% or greater district chronic absenteeism rate, or
2. 15% or greater chronic absenteeism rate at a single school.

Under the bill, a student is chronically absent if he or she is absent, at any point in the school year, more than 10% of the school days that he or she has been enrolled in the school that year. A school district's or individual school's chronic absentee rate is the percentage of the district's or school's students who are chronically absent. The absentee and enrollment numbers from the previous school year must be used for this calculation.

The bill requires each board of education to add the number of chronically absent children to the annual strategic school profile, which by law each district must provide for each of its schools and the district as a whole. It also specifies that the profile must state the number of truants rather than report on truancy in general. By law, a truant is a student with four or more unexcused absences in a month or 10 unexcused absences in any school year.

*House Amendment "A" (1) requires the review teams to review the cases of, and discuss interventions for, truants in addition to chronically absent students; (2) changes the definition of chronically absent child to mean a child who is absent, at any point in the school year, more than 10% of the school days that he or she has been enrolled in the school rather than 18 or more unexcused absences as in the

original file; (3) requires that excused, unexcused, disciplinary, and certain in-school suspensions count toward a child's absentee rate rather than just unexcused absences; and (4) makes other minor and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2014

DISTRICT SCHOOL ATTENDANCE REVIEW TEAM

The review team must meet at least monthly and is responsible for (1) reviewing the cases of truant and chronically absent children, (2) discussing school interventions and community referrals as necessary, and (3) making any additional recommendations for truant and chronically absent children and their families.

Under the bill, the review team can consist of school administrators, guidance counselors, school social workers, teachers, and staff from community-based programs who provide programs and services to truants and chronically absent children and their families.

ABSENCE FROM SCHOOL

Under the bill, absence from school means (1) excused or unexcused absences, (2) disciplinary absences, and (3) in-school suspensions if the suspension is one-half of a school day or more.

By law, the State Board of Education (SBE) is required to define excused and unexcused absences (see BACKGROUND). The bill specifies that these definitions must be used to determine the chronic absenteeism rate at schools and districts.

The bill requires the SBE to also define "disciplinary absence." SBE, at the same time it defined excused and unexcused absences, defined disciplinary absences as those that result from school or district disciplinary action.

BACKGROUND

Excused and Unexcused Absences

The State Board of Education adopted definitions of excused and unexcused absences on June 27, 2012, as it was required to do by law.

The following are considered excused:

1. For absences one through nine, when the student provides written documentation (i.e., a signed note from parent or guardian) of the reason for the absence within 10 school days of the student's return to school.
2. For the 10th and any additional absences, the same written documentation is needed and only the following reasons suffice: (a) student illness (with appropriate verification from a medical professional), (b) observance of a religious holiday, (c) death in the family or other emergency beyond the family's control, (d) mandated court appearance, (e) lack of transportation that the district normally provides, or (f) extraordinary educational opportunity pre-approved by the district in accordance with SDE guidance.

An absence is considered unexcused unless it meets one of the definitions of an excused absence or is a disciplinary absence. All other absences are unexcused. Disciplinary absences are absences that are the result of school or district disciplinary action and are excluded from these definitions.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 32 Nay 1 (03/19/2014)